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WHAT IS AN ANARCHIST?

BY GEORGE WHARTON PEPPER

SOMEBODY called Henry Ford an anarchist. This, he said, was untrue. He declared that he had been damaged to the tune of a million dollars, and he brought suit to recover that sum.

The jury, being possessed of a sense of humor, estimated his damage at six cents.

Nobody cares much whether Ford is an anarchist or merely what his testimony shows him to be. But his libel suit has brought the subject of anarchy into the foreground of our thinking and we find ourselves asking whether this heresy can properly be imputed to the man who is at the moment the most conspicuous person in the world.

—What is an anarchist, anyway?

Ford says an anarchist is a man who is against the Government and throws bombs.

That is a pretty good definition. Dress is up a bit by cutting out the bombs and it would sound quite well—thus:

“An anarchist is one who seeks to overthrow the existing Government and to establish nothing in its place.”

Tested by this definition, is Woodrow Wilson an anarchist? That is a startling question, but it is asked in all seriousness, and it deserves careful consideration. Before answering it, here are some points to consider:

Against the conclusion that Mr. Wilson is an anarchist, are most of his public utterances. He has written books and made speeches in which he treats with great respect government in general and this government in particular. If there is anything to be said on the other side, it is not on account of his preaching, but because of his practice.

Is it possible that, while preaching government, he is promoting anarchy?

In favor of this view, it might be said that he exerted every ounce of pressure he could command to upset the

government established by the strong hand of President Huerta in Mexico, and, as the only substitute, seriously proposed Villa, the incarnation of anarchy and lawlessness.

This action, however, was not due to a desire to overturn government as such, but merely to Mr. Wilson's belief that President Huerta was a bad man and that it would be better for Mexico and the world to have Villa in his place. While, therefore, there is no doubt that what Mr. Wilson did promoted anarchy and caused bloodshed and enormous pecuniary loss, it cannot fairly be said that he intended the natural consequences of his act. It was merely a monumental blunder.

The recent impotent attempt to go bandit-hunting within the preserves of an independent state shows how little he understands the elements of international law.

Again, it might be urged that he had the intentions of an anarchist when he consistently sought to separate the German people from their government, apparently heedless of the frightful danger which ensued—that when victory had crowned our sacrifices, there would be no stable or responsible government with which to make peace.

But this was not the pursuit of anarchy for anarchy's sake. It was merely a thing done under the fixed delusion that the heart of the German people was not in the war, and that if only enough talk were addressed to them they would throw down their arms. Indeed, it is quite possible that to this day Mr. Wilson believes it was his letters and speeches which produced the collapse of German militarism rather than the intense pressure organized and exerted by Marshal Foch.

Mr. Wilson's action in the Italian situation comes much nearer to the move of an anarchist. At a time when it was of the utmost importance to preserve in Europe something like respect for constituted authority and organized government, he deliberately undertook to array the Italian people against their own Government—not as a desperate measure resorted to against an enemy in war-time, but as a legitimate step in the intercourse between friendly nations.

There are rumors also that during the Peace Conference Mr. Wilson again and again forced the hand of Lloyd George and Clemenceau by veiled threats of an appeal to laboring men in England and France to join him in coercing their respective governments.

This way of doing things helps to bring the idea of government into disrepute. It promotes anarchy and arouses class feeling. The man who resorts to it is worse than a demagogue. A demagogue, by appealing to the passion or prejudice of the moment, attempts to rally masses of his fellow citizens to his support in order that he may become a powerful factor in his own country. What Mr. Wilson appears to have done is to stir up, or threaten to stir up, the masses of the people in friendly countries against their own governments in order to compel their representatives to accept his solution of international problems. Such a procedure promotes anarchy. Is the promoter of anarchy an anarchist?

The answer depends upon a single point—whether a man is an anarchist merely because he makes wreckage of government, or whether it is necessary that he have the *intention* of a wrecker. That Mr. Wilson has done far more than any man in this generation to undermine our American Constitutional system may be held as a permissible individual opinion. That he has meant to undermine it or that he has had an intent hostile to government, is not for a moment to be believed. The fact seems to be that Mr. Wilson is by temperament and habit of thought entirely unfitted to hold the office of Chief Magistrate in any state in which the legislature and the judiciary are intended to share with the executive the responsibilities of government.

To be a worthy President under a constitutional system like ours, a man must not merely play the part of a public servant, but must also recognize that certain other people are likewise public servants, and that the theory of our government is that all should work together as a team.

Mr. Wilson's decision to go to Paris as our Peace Commissioner was entirely consistent with a conception of government in which all functions can best be discharged by a single governmental officer. Our system contemplates the calm and unprejudiced review, first by the President and then by the Senate, of the work accomplished in conference by our commissioners. The fact that if he acted as commissioner and dominated his associates there would be nobody but the Senate to review his work, not only seemed to Mr. Wilson no reason for remaining at his desk, but suggested to him the possibility of so dealing with the Senators as to make their revision purely formal.

Mr. Wilson has wonderful powers, but they are those which fit a man for solitary rule. He doubtless conceives of himself as the agent of the people. But the fact is that while he has a genius for principalship, he has no capacity for agency. He talks much of the mandate of the people; but seemingly his working test of what the people want is to inquire what it is that he himself has determined to do. A man of Mr. Wilson's type cannot be a servant, and therefore cannot be a public servant.

As for team work, he apparently has no conception of its meaning. In the present governmental crisis, it probably never occurs to him that the Constitution of the United States is the standing expression of the will of the people, and that under it the Senate is charged with the duty of exercising a free judgment upon the Covenant and the Treaty. No doubt he is entirely honest in his belief that the determination of the Senate to make the treaty safe by amendment is due either to provincial narrowness or pure perversity. That the people want action taken according to a collective judgment and not according to a solitary obsession, is a truth for which there is no room in his capacious head.

When this article appears in print Mr. Wilson may be "swinging around the circle." Doubtless he will do this with a sincere belief that in true democratic fashion he is reporting to his masters, the people, and that he is seeking their mandate for execution when he returns to Washington. In point of fact, his journey will be merely a sustained effort to secure backing in his struggle to run the Government alone. It will be a desperate attempt to persuade the American people that they will be safer and happier if they trust their President rather than their Constitution.

Mr. Wilson has a large personal following, but he has to a great extent dissolved the Democratic Party. There are plenty of public assurances of loyalty to him from party leaders and workers, but the real state of mind of these men is an open secret. He can command much individual support for his League and Treaty programme by the very process of appealing to the people against their Senate. But this involves the sacrifice of a governmental system to his own conception of how a particular issue ought to be

decided. Such a procedure is essentially destructive. It is not revolutionary in the best sense, because there is no proposal to substitute anything for our Constitution except the will of one man. The Executive who permits himself to make such an appeal may not recognize himself as an enemy of all government, but he is certainly the enemy of our American governmental system, and, if allowed a free hand, would undoubtedly bring about its disintegration.

It is aside from the purpose of this article to comment upon the painful revelation of Mr. Wilson's political morality recently afforded by the White House conference. Suffice it to observe that the seeds of death are lurking in his attempt to get the Allies to adopt the League by representing that its covenants mean what they say and in his desperate efforts to secure ratification here by giving assurances that the covenants can be made to mean whatever we choose to read into them. It is characteristic of such a mind to be more absorbed by chaotic international conditions than by the more normal though sufficiently exacting problems which are the incidents of an orderly and established national government. Mr. Wilson is an internationalist not because he is disloyal to the United States, but because he thinks he can directly influence all nations for good instead of serving the world best by serving America. He is not consciously opposed to all government as such. He is, therefore, not an anarchist in the proper sense of that term. But he has a temperament and habit of mind distinctly hostile to a form of government such as ours. He would make an ideal president for the League of Nations, both because he would have no national prejudices to overcome, and because the Covenant of the League of Nations is essentially un-American in that it exalts the executive department of government at the expense of both the legislative and judicial. The interests of the League would be entirely safe in his hands because there would be no larger entity into which he could resolve it—at least, not unless and until effective communication can be established with the people of Mars. And if we cannot have an American as the League's first President, our second choice ought certainly to be a man from America.

GEORGE WHARTON PEPPER.